

**Political History Collection
Interview H.0001.13 : Tape 13**

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Gender: Male
Age: 58
Date of Birth: 1935

Abstract

Drakten [Tib. grags bstan] was a monk official in the traditional Tibetan government and discusses, in detail, the political events that occurred in Lhasa in the 1950s. In this interview, he discusses the rumors and political events regarding the People's Association that occurred in Lhasa in the 1950s. He talks about the monk militia, the multiple meetings between the two Sitsabs and the Chinese, and the supposed 400,000 "signatures" of the supporters of the People's Association. Finally, he discusses the arrival of the Chinese and how their behavior changed throughout the 1950s.

Tape 13

Q: Last time, we spoke about Chamdo. From Chamdo you and your uncle came up to Lhasa, right? When was this?

A: Yes. This was in 1950.

Q: So when you came to Lhasa what did you and your uncle do and what was the political situation at that time? The Dalai Lama was in Yadong right?

A: Yes, the Dalai Lama was in Yadong. When we arrived, the Chinese had not come. When we heard that the Chinese had come to Chamdo, we left, right? They went for the 17-Point Agreement, but they had not returned as [of] yet. So in the upper areas [Central and Western Tibet], the Chinese had not come. At Lharigo there were a few regiments. At Kongpo Giamda, Sawang Lhalu was there with quite a number of soldiers. The monk militia were there [Tib. ser dmag]. Amazingly, the monk militias from the 3 great monasteries totalled only about 70 in number. It's just like a hand gesture, mudra [Tib. phyag rgya]. There were really no actual plans for them to fight. For example, Sera had 5,500 monks, Drepung 7,700 and Ganden 3,300. So there were over 20,000 monks, and in such an emergency situation, there should have been a militia formation. Or they shouldn't have called the monk militia because the main consideration was not to have the monks as the soldiers. If all one needed was 70 odd people, then there was no need to have from the great monasteries.

Q: How did this happen? When an emergency situation arises, there must have been some discussions at the monasteries.

A: Actually, each monastery had volunteers. All of the monks were volunteers, those who wanted to sacrifice their lives. That's all the number of monks. During this time in the lower areas, it was said that the monk militias were coming and there was a great clamor [Tib. skad grags]. The saying that clamor is greater than war [Tib. dmag las 'ur che], actually the other side hears a lot of noise. If the monasteries sent about 5 to 6 thousand, it would still be a situation of few monks and not too many. There were many able bodied monks. During this time in Lhasa, there were not so many soldiers. We had the 3,000 soldiers in the Tibetan military .

Q: At Chamdo there were about 3,000 or do you mean all together?

A: Altogether. But at that time it had increased. Probably there were about 5-6,000. A new Magji was appointed. This was Magji Jangjenlogo (Lokela) [Tib. lcang can blo khog (blo skal lags)] who was the Magji in 1959. Before that he was the paymaster or Phogang in Chamdo during Sawang Lhalu's time. After he came to Lhasa, he was appointed Magji. His rank was only Khenjung but he was the magji. Generally, the situation was such that a gyagpön could keep 1 soldier as a servant. A rüpon, 2 soldiers and a depön, 4 soldiers. Now I'm not sure about these figures, but from the soldiers they could keep servants. Since the various heads had 2 persons, they took the salary, and when it came time to count the numbers it seemed complete, but when they counted the actual people, it was not quite filled since they had collected the salary and soldiers were not there in person. So something like

this happened it seems. So during Jangjenlogo's time, it was said that the actual soldiers must be inducted [Tib. ngo 'dzugs], and [they] did away with keeping their salary. This was done away with and the number of soldiers missing were reinstituted. A totally new regiment was not formed, but it seems that when one wanted to do the counting, the actual soldiers were not there. So all of this was fixed in by Jangjenlogo.

Q: When the Chinese came, some soldiers must have gone down, right? They must have fought somewhat?

A: Since there was an emergency on the border, the government should have sent reinforcements, right? Generally, at the borders, on the main route, there were border guards [Tib. sa srung]. But there was about one gyagpön or so. In Gamtog Drukha, there was one regiment. At Riwoche, another. And in the Den [Tib. ldan] area too. There were about 5 various regiments in the lower areas. One was at Chamdo as guards of the Doji. [There were] about 100 soldiers. Up this side, there were the Dingri, Trapchi, Police, Gusung and Gyantse Regiments. These were in Lhasa and at Dingri.

Q: I saw some photos of Ragashag where he was going some place.

A: Ragashag was sent via the northern route as the general [Tib. spyi khyab]. Later, after the 17-Point Agreement, it was amalgamated. Ragashag went until Talung [Tib. stag lung] and it is said that at Talung he performed an exorcism or torgya. It is said that Sawang Ragashag himself did the torgya, wearing a black hat, et cetera. Ragashag, hereditarily was like a lama when he got to Talung. Lhagyari Trichen [Tib. lha rgya ri khri chen] is the same. During Mönlam, the Ngadagyesum [Tib. mnga' dwags rgyal gsum]; Ngari [Tib. mnga' ris] Tratsang, Dakpo Tratsang and the Chönkorgye [Tib. chos 'khor rgyal] Tratsang, would have an assembly. And he [Lhagyari] headed it since he was a descendant of the dharma kings.

Q: Besides Ragashag, didn't others go? Wasn't there fighting? What about Derge Sey?

A: Derge Sey was the commander of the Gamtog Drukha Regiment. These were the ones already there. Then Karchungwa [Tib. dkar byung ba] was at the Riwoche Jadang Regiment. Derge Sey was the Tadang Depön. I think there were regiments from Ka to Ta.

Q: When you came up to Lhasa, where did you all stay?

A: We stayed in Ganden Khagsar [Tib. dga' ldan khang gsar] near Ramoche.

Q: During this time were you working for the government?

A: No, not at this time?

Q: What was your uncle doing?

A: Yesterday, I was mentioning [talking] about my uncle who was staying at Norbulinga. He was Kungö Yeshe Lhundrup. The one I went with to Kham is Kungö Shatsela. I was sent as Kungö's servant. When I came up, my uncle was appointed on Ngabö's staff and he went as far as Lharigo. That was when it was said that Chamdo was lost to the Chinese. Lhalu said that they should go to the 5 various dzong of Kongpo and try to stop the possible Chinese advance by taking some of the rural militia. When we got to Lharigo, it was said that my uncle was in Kongpo. So we came up to Lhasa. The Sitsab were appointed. The Dalai Lama was not there and the trunyichemmo were not there. The acting trunyichemmo or drungsab, was the late Thubden Sangyela, and Trunyichemmo Angula. There was also all acting sawang, like Thubden Ramyangla [Tib. thub bstan rab dbyangs] and Shasur.

Q: At that time the Chinese had yet to arrive, right?

A: Yes, still to come. Then after the 17-Point Agreement, the Zhongyang representative Zhang Dai biao [Zhang Jingwu] came via Yadong and Lhasa. He had written a letter to the two Sitsab from Yadong saying that the ambassador of the Central Committee was going to arrive on such and such date, and that wherever the first Tibetan government reception was to take place, the two Sitsab must come.

It is said that the two Sitsab did the following. Earlier there was the Shashöchangsum, that was, Shatra, Shölkhang and Changkhyim. They received the duty of Sitsab while the 13th [Dalai Lama] was away. During this time, the Ambans arrived and whatever reception was accorded, they ordered that the documents concerning such reception should be searched for. They looked for this document at the gag [Secretariat office], but they did not find it there. Later it was found at the Kashag and given to Shö gag. So the Sitsab looked at the documents and, accordingly, the reception took place at Gyetse luding, a park north of Jensei Phodrang. Most of the officials were sent there and the two Sitsab stayed in the Tsuglagang in the gathering hall called Nangsi. When the Chinese arrived, the Sitsab met them in the Nangsi, and tea and rice were served and they retired to their places. In the Nangsi, there was a platform [Tib. sdang cha] and a throne. These were put aside. Below the platform the seats were placed in a circle with the Sitsab on one side and the Chinese on the other. The two Sitsab came up to the door and as soon as Zhang Jingwu came in they met him there. Khata scarfs were exchanged and they shook hands. He shook hands with the Sitsab Lama saying, "Good, good [Tib. hao, hao]." Then he shook Sitsab Dekara's hands, and while standing and holding his hands, he said, "Everything went very well." "Between the Central Committee and Tibet, between two brothers, no blood was shed. Tibetans received a peaceful liberation and peaceful discussions were held. This is most wonderful isn't it?" Dekara said, "Now, please come in, come in. Please sit down. Regarding these matters, we will discuss slowly." It seemed that he [Zhang Jingwu] wanted to hear something to the effect that peaceful discussions were held and no lives were lost. It seemed that the moment the two Sitsab said that it was good, then they would have felt that the Tibetan government accepted and hailed the Agreement. This seems to have been the main concern. So this was what was said immediately as he came into the room. It seemed that they did have a fear that all of a sudden something might come out. So Dekara was saying first come in and we will discuss later. It is said that his [Zhang Jingwu's] facial expression changed somewhat. So they sat down and tea was served, and as soon as the tea was poured into the cup, through the interpreter, he said the same thing— Dekara said, "Regarding these things, I have a lot to say, so please

may I please inform you gradually?" They were saying that the 17-Point Agreement was excellent, wasn't it? It seemed that if the two Sitsab said something in favor of this, it would indicate that the Tibetan government had fully accepted the 17-Point Agreement. So it seems this was the importance and this was the reason they were asking. The two Sitsab, with this fully in mind, also did not say anything.

Q: Later the two Sitsab and the Chinese had a lot of talks right? How many times and where?

A: Many times. Even at the Potala where the Dalai Lama participated too. When the Chinese said that they wanted to meet the Dalai Lama, then the two Sitsab were called. The Sitsab's seats were arranged and they sat, and then the Chinese were called in. Then when they needed to speak on the matters, the two Sitsab answered. Later it was said that they wanted to meet the Kashag and the Sitsab alone, and so they met in the Nangsi. Then in the Ewam, the Kashag and the Sitsab met.

Q: Ewam means?

A: It's in the Tsuglagang. Then at the Tsokyi Phodrang [Tib. mtsho dkyil pho brang], in the Jensei Phodrang, there were many talks. During one meeting regarding the People's Association, the first People's Association was Thamjō Sonam, Tsha Trunyi et cetera. When they arose, they said that the Sitsab must arrest them [Tib. do dam]. That they, the People's Association, "Cannot be allowed to just do reckless things. Besides, you must give orders that they cannot do such things even in the future." The 2 Sitsab said, "Our government has its own organizational rules. The petitions of the People's Association concerning their situation [Tib. bde sdug] are done according to tradition and custom. And the manner in which they are making the petition is with their cheeks touching the ground [Tib. 'gram pa sa bab] and khata in their hands. Our miser are stating the difficulties in their lives. That they are having such and such difficulties. So regarding the difficulties, they are saying please do such and such things. So when the People's Association is saying this, we have to listen to all of this. Then after listening, if there are genuine grievances and if there is room for governmental consideration, then we say, 'You have petitioned regarding this and that matter, and the government will do such and such things. Regarding this other matter, that too is alright. But regarding this matter, although you have asked for such and such things, [with] our government policy this is not possible.' In this way we have to give replies. Just giving orders and saying to arrest people who have come to petition with khata and with cheeks touching the ground, is just not at all proper." When Dekara said this, did not reply at all but just said, "Behind the curtain there are people hiding. Behind the curtain there are people hiding [Tib. yol ba'i rgyab la mi 'dug]." Then saying that there was no use in talking, they suddenly got up and left the meeting. This account was told to me by Kungö Shatsela. He and the Sitsab Lama were very intimate and had been since early on. Later after, he was the ex-Sitsab, and when they just sat around and talked about things, this is what Sitsab Lama told Kungö Shatsela. That behind the curtain there were people hiding. This meant that behind the People's Association are the Sitsab. This was one incident. Another incident, it was said that in the Ewam there were many encounters. A more vociferous one took place in the Nangsi room of the Tsuglagang. Mainly the discussions were all about the 17-Point Agreement. The Chinese were saying that it had to be implemented. The Sitsab were saying that it had to be re-thought and re-discussed, and just could not be implemented because it was inappropriate to implement. Basically this was just the gist he said. There were just brief periods when they went in to serve tea and things, otherwise, Kungö Nendron and others closed the doors and stayed outside. It was the government tradition that when talks were taking place, they could not just stand and listen. It was the same in the Kashag. The Kadrung had to knock on the door and enter, make his request and leave immediately. He could not just stand around. The same was true of the Nendron. So Kungö Trekhang Samjola could not tell me in detail of the conversations. However, he said that they spoke very loud and with bold words. He said that when Kungö Dekara got infuriated, his speech got loud. So they could also hear some on the outside. Then it also got very late with all the talk. Then all of a sudden a strong wind blew and the enclosed space near the door [Tib. sgo bshag] fell [the gobsha near/over the door]. The Chinese got very startled, "Don't worry, don't worry, just the gobsha fell. You don't have to be alarmed." That same evening, soldiers had come as escorts, and outside there were soldiers, on the rooftops too, all armed with guns. Kungö Lukhangwa had a Nepalese dagger [Tib. gri gor pen] under his seat carpet. Near him was the Chinese representative. It seemed that if there was a tussle, he probably had the audacity to think that he could have used the dagger and killed him [Zhang Jingwu]. Usually Kungö Dekara does not wear his glasses. That day he even had his glasses on and was aggressive [Tib. ngar shugs] very much. Kungö [Samjola] said that that was the only time he saw Kungö Degara wear his glasses. He said he worried about what might transpire. But then the meeting adjourned. He said it was all about the 17-Point Agreement but he did not hear the words very well. Then in the Jensei Phodrang, in the Tshokyil Phodrang, they met. At this place, the Chinese said that in the 17-Point Agreement, there was an article saying that the Tibetan Army was to change to the People's Liberation Army, and the soldiers had to wear Chinese uniforms. Also, that on the roof of the military headquarters, they had to hoist a Chinese flag, and also [put] a flag on the Potala. To this the Sitsab said, "This will not do at all. How is this possible? How can one hoist two flags on one roof? How can two people sit on one chair? Whose custom is this? This is not possible. The flag has been there since Tibet began and it will not be taken down. If the People's Liberation Army takes it down, the Tibetan Army will not just stand by." This is what was said and I don't know what the reply to that was, but usually it was Kungö Degkara who was the angry one. But this time Kungö Sitsab Lama got angry. He got so furious that he blurted out in Chinese. Since it was in Chinese, it was not known what was said. Then when they were riding together, Dekara told Sitsab Lama, "You know Kungö, today you really made them become lackluster [Tib. mog mog por btang]." In reply, Sitsab Lama said, "Sure. The way he spoke, the words he used were just horrible. I just had no patience to wait for the interpreter. I was so angry and since I had stayed in China as the representative [Tib. don gcod], I know some Chinese. I was not satisfied with the interpreter's Chinese and so I just spoke out."

Q: What does mog mog po mean?

A: I don't know. What shall I say, it is also said like a stunning blow [Tib. klad pa 'gems], or sort of to intimidate someone by one's power [Tib. zil gyis gnon pa]. Sort of something that could not be replied to. I wonder if it means that. I don't know. This mog mog po seems to be kind of his own word.

Generally, I have never heard of this.

Q: Earlier you mentioned the People's Association. When I asked around, some said that since in the 17-Point Agreement there

was such a thing as if the people agreed, then it was all right. It seems that the importance of the people was emphasized. Some say that maybe it was because of this that the People's Association rose up. Some say that the Sitsab were with the People's Association. Others say that the People's Association were supporting the two Sitsab. The Chinese were saying that the Sitsab instigated the People's Association, right? Now as I look at it, say when one is writing a history, whether the People's Association were behind the Sitsab or the Sitsab instigated the People's Association, it really sort of doesn't matter because it shows that both the government and the people were against the Chinese. So during this time, if you were to think about it, what seemed to be the relations between the People's Association and the Sitsab.

A: Perhaps, in my opinion, the 17-Point Agreement had to be implemented because if one did not, it was an unmanageable and uncontrollable situation [Tib. 'ab su rtsa ba nas ma 'dus pa]. There was no choice. So when one read the Agreement, it was not at all a situation where everyone agreed with it. Earlier Ngabö was dissatisfied [Tib. yi ma rang], but from our side, since we had to, for the time being, return back and work, and in order to continue the power of the government, 7 articles were added, like the power and status of the Dalai Lama will remain, et cetera, et cetera. These were the new points that they said they instituted. However, the 10 points that the Chinese had given, these were not possible to reject since the Chinese would not listen. Since these points were instituted, from our side we were holding on to some power. However, in the main part it was stated that the liberation would proceed according to the wishes of the people. Since then, the question of whether to liberate or not was left up to the wishes of the people. So the reason the People's Association rose and made the petition, it is correct that work had to proceed according to the wishes of the people, but the people were saying that they didn't accept the 17-Point Agreement at all.

The Sitsab, since they were politically responsible at that time, the two of them together agreed to disagree. On the one hand, it seems that the Tibetans and the Chinese were working together. On the other hand, if just upholding the principle of good relations and letting the Chinese do whatever they want and implementing whatever they said, then this seems to indicate that there was no government. So the two Sitsab, the way they thought, they felt that there should come no harm to the politics in the future, so they sacrificed their lives. Whatever, it was, they felt that what one had to say, one should say it and there was no use in just holding back. Having decided to sacrifice their lives, come what may come, they felt that what should be said should be said. As I see it, from Ngabö's perspective, the 10 points that the Chinese had already prepared, since this was just not permitted to be altered or discussed, he would naturally have some dissatisfaction, right? Based on this, it was later said that the government was not consulted. Whether they permitted this or not, it was still unsatisfactory. For this reason, the real seal was not used. That was one reason. Another reason was that the two Sitsab, as I mentioned earlier, since they had to bear the responsibility, they could not, saying that it was for the sake of good relations, allow them to do whatever they wanted to do. It was our land and our country, and having sacrificed their lives, they held firmly onto the pillar of religion and politics so that it would not fall. From the perspective of the People's Association, they said that the 17-Point Agreement was not acceptable and should not be accepted. They said that this article and that article needed to be amended. They were saying a lot of this. So if the government objected to the 17-Point Agreement and if the People's Association supported it whole heartily, then there was no way the government could have stopped it. But the government and the people, the forceful aggression [Tib. btsan dbang] of the Chinese just continued to remain as forceful aggression [Tib. btsan dbang], as proof. There was no acceptance from the head nor the tail. Especially the poorer miser. [They] were even more hard-headed and they could have accepted it, but they just never liked the Chinese and they were even more hard-headed.

Q: If that was the case, then whether it was the People's Association, the government, or other officials, they had no connections? Even the two Sitsab? Generally, people like Thamjö Sonamla and Tsha Trunyila, were they people who took interest in politics?

A: Yes, they were. Generally, in the People's Association there was a very large section who were politically conscious. Very large. Especially Tsha Trunyila and their organization, [who] had distributed all of their letters to the various dzong. In the case of Lhasa, in the various occupations, for example, like leather workers [Tib. rngo bzo], those who do "tanning" [Tib. ko sreg], Tibetan woolen boot [Tib. zon pa] makers, rainbow design boot and monk's boot [Tib. 'ja' chen ras zom] makers, chupa makers, hat makers, carpenters, masons, etcetera, et cetera, all of these various groups had put their "signature". In the various dzong, the Tsodrag, Gempo, the more prominent people, they all had their "signatures." Ngawang Tempala was saying that if one were to estimate the number of people [in the Association], it would be about 400,000.

Q: Four hundred thousand, you mean?

A: Yes, the "support" groups standing behind, [Tib. rgyab shugs]. Well numbers are numbers, but if one has to count the numbers then one way to do it is to count the signatures. I mean, there is no use in just throwing about some figures. That's useless. But that was the way he said it was spread out.

Q: Last year Lhatsun Labrang Chandzö told me that he himself had 50,000 names from various dzong. As I was thinking about it, 50,000 names would be just absolutely so long. So, [if] they were from the various dzong, then how did they do it? Would the tsodrag say that under them there were this number of people and then seal it? Or some other organization in the dzong? But each person writing their names is difficult, isn't it?

A: That's difficult. Not possible. I think it is that way. But mind you, I can't say absolutely it happened that way. But if one goes according to how things are done, then, for example, in one dzong, there are many chiefs [Tib. 'go byed]. There are various dingkhag. Under each dingkhag are the various gembo (headmen). So one would discuss with a few of the larger dingkhag and they would tell their own gembo, who in turn would tell their own people. For example, one gembo would say, "I have such number of people and they all "support it." So the number of people under him was enumerated. If he said, "I have under me such number of people, but only so many support," then that number would be counted. It is probably something like this, but each person's "signature" could not be covered. But most importantly, they had the "signature" of the various dingkhag. So if one counts in this way, then there definitely would be 400,000 persons.

Q: Yes, we did talk about the two Sitsab last time, but even if you say it twice, you may cover some aspects not done earlier. Now, when you returned to Lhasa in '50 and while you were at Lhasa, then the Chinese arrived, right? Generally, as I question people,

the policy of the Chinese in '50, '51 was very diplomatic. Then there was this deteriorating effect as time passed. Did this take place after the roads were completed or was it after the Khamba Rebellion in '55, '56? If you look from '51 through '58, when did things tighten up?

A: At first when they came, what Kungö Liushar said was that the soldiers that were to be sent to Tibet, were sent every two months. At Chengdu military base they gave them an education. They told the soldiers, "Even if a Tibetan slaps you across the face, you must smile and thank him, and do not behave rough [Tib. rtsub po]." The soldiers could not go and stay in the Tibetan village houses, and not a needle or a thread could be taken from the people. That animals could not be let loose when the fields were planted. They were taught these things and when they did come up, they were all mild mannered. Then, gradually, like one's behavior, it became clearer as one got to know them. When they spoke it got rough. Specially, the soldiers and the majority did not make much nuisance since they were under their code of behavior, but the Chinese cadres got worse and worse. After the Khamba Rebellion, they used that [as a] reason to make many bunkers. Especially at Trip. On the other side of the river exactly opposite of the [Potala] Palace, they placed 13 big gunnery units [Tib. me sgyogs] facing the Palace. Since they were covered, they looked like tents pitched. Huge 13 covered protractions. These were permanently stationed. At the time of the uprising, then there was artillery placed everywhere. In the Tsidrung Lingka and Chandzö Lingka, which were adjacent to each other, Kungö Tempala said that they had dug huge "burrows" [Tib. sa shur]. If they were going to shell the Potala, then the burrows were made this way and on top of the burrows, they arranged logs and covered [them] with mud about one foot in height. Exactly half of the burrow was covered and the other half was empty with space for to go forward.

Under the covered section the guns were loaded and whatever. The moment it was time to fire, it moved and the shell was fired. Then the gun returned to the covered portion. So he said that this was how it was made. They were arranged in lines in the parks. The Kungö saw that between Tsidrung Lingka and Trede Lingka, 13 of these burrows later on were being filled in. Here it was also arranged in this way. This is the area where the uprising took place on March 10th, the 30th of the 1st Tibetan month. The artillery was fired on the night of March 19th, or the 11th day. This much the Kungö saw, though when they fired, they fired from all directions. In a nutshell, as they got more and more prepared, their policy got harsher. They put the blame on the Khambas, but when they had gotten fully prepared, then By this time, the two Sitsab were not even around. But let us assume that they were there, and if they spoke in such a fashion in 1958, then they would definitely have been arrested. So there would not have been any other way but that.